

H E L L O

F R O M

O N T A R I O

Report #9

MCC Peace Section

Task Force on Women in Church and Society

October - December, 1975

With this issue, the editorship of the Task Force Report falls to Margaret Loewen Reimer and Sue Clemmer Steiner, both of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. Marg is the assistant editor of the Mennonite Reporter; Sue buys books for the Canadian Provident Bookstores. Our thanks goes to Luann Habegger Martin of Washington, D.C. for her perseverance in preparing the first eight Reports.

We won't blame Christina Reimer's birth on July 15 for the lapse between the May Report and this one. Christina brings all of us here too much joy to blame her for anything!

The content of this Report falls into three categories. First, we want to comment on how women fared at official conferences held by three constituent MCC bodies this summer - the Mennonite Brethren, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and the Mennonite Church.

Secondly, we want to report on some of the projects which Task Force members are currently giving their attention to. These include 1) contact with Mennonite colleges re library holdings and course offerings on women's concerns, 2) the avoidance of role stereotyping in the Foundation Sunday school curriculum presently being written, and 3) a response to the International Women's Year Tribune in Mexico City. Following the Foundation report, we will suggest some non-stereotyped books for small children currently available.

We will conclude with mini-reports of seminars on women's concerns around the Canadian sisterhood. We hope by this to convey a sense of "what's happening" as well as to provide stimulus for local planners.

I. The MB's, the GC's and the MC's: How Women Fared this Summer

CANADIAN CONFERENCE DIVIDED
OVER TEENAGE ELECTION
by Margaret Loewen Reimer

People always seem to be lamenting the absence of women and young people in official church positions. Well, at this summer's meeting of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, the delegates elected a young person and a woman, in one package, to the Board of Congregational Resources.

Marielee Bergen is a teenager from Regina, Sask. She was nominated from the floor by another woman and was voted in by the delegates. A while later, during another discussion, an irate woman got up and spoke to the delegates present

against Marielee's election. Her complaint seemed to be that people should earn their right to be on a conference board and that a young girl has not earned this right. She felt, also, that delegates had been made to feel guilty for not having more women and youth on committees and had voted her in for this reason.

Not a very encouraging beginning for Marielee, but she obviously had enough support from delegates to be elected. She joins several other women who are taking an increasing number of positions on various conference boards.

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The Congregational Resources Board also presented a paper at this 1975 conference on Women and the Bible prepared by Peter H. Janzen, pastor from Leamington, Ont. He pointed out the significant role played by women in the Bible and scripture's positive attitude toward them. A response to the paper by Anita Janzen, nursing instructor from Toronto, raised a few hackles. She asked some straightforward questions about women's role in the church today.

Discussion was generally positive except for one woman who declared that she could hardly wait until this year was over so she wouldn't have to hear about women anymore!

A NEW POSITION FOR MENNONITE BRETHERN WOMEN by Neoma Jantz

Women in the Mennonite Brethren Conference in Canada are now eligible to be elected as delegates to conferences and to some church and conference boards and committees. They will not be ordained to the ministry, nor can they be elected to boards whose work is of the nature of eldership.

This position was accepted by Canadian Mennonite Brethren at their convention held last July at Regina, Saskatchewan. It was the first convention held in facilities which provided food service and child care, thus freeing all women to attend all business sessions.

Although the resolution passed by a 339 to 20 majority, it elicited more discussion than any other issue. Most delegates felt comfortable with such a defined role. They were reminded that a good deal of the local church's organized activity is administered and supported by devoted female members. And for years women missionaries have done similar types of work abroad that men have done at home. But a few definitely feared that this concession would be the first step in the direction of sisters taking over the leadership of the congrega-

tion. Others felt this was bowing to contemporary cultural pressures - a bending of scripture to accommodate a dissatisfied segment in the church.

Were women at the convention pushing for more control? Not really. In fact, only two women voiced a public response, both after the resolution had already been passed, indicating that women were not interested in leading men, but simply in wanting to be part of the work of the church.

Actually part of the resolution was after the fact since women had already been delegates for the past several years. This year with 105 female and 363 male representatives the marked increase in female involvement was indeed noteworthy. There is no woman on a Canadian Conference board at present, and the increased female influence will likely be most noticeable on the provincial and local level.

At the same time, not all women were that concerned about the whole issue. This became evident at Regina from the "Fascinating Womanhood" seminar sponsored by a local Mennonite Brethren women's committee. This option, for women supposedly not interested in the business sessions, drew strong and conflicting responses. While the conference family format encouraged female attendance in the business discussions, the four-hour lecture with its stress on woman's role as wife and mother discouraged it. That really left the dilemma of female involvement in the laps of the women!

However, all in all the reaction to the resolution was positive, and spoke of good faith between the sexes, and a united commitment to growth and service.

ASSEMBLY 75
FALLS SHORT OF EXPECTATIONS
by Dorothy Yoder Nyce

Dear Sue and Margaret:

Thanks for your letter and request. My response will be quite personal, open to vulnerability. August and Assembly '75 at Eureka seem a bit distant. Your asking for a response to discussion there of Women in the Church brought a sigh of heaviness.

I was not there for the final discussion and delegate action on the Task Force's prepared statement for facilitating biblical understandings about men and women. In floor discussion the mike was busy, comments varied. Myron Augsburg said a lot and was applauded. Bertha Beachy helped us laugh; we should have heard more from her. Action concluded in acknowledging the document as a working statement, not a position to be fully endorsed. With only 12-15 percent of the congregation's leaders having responded to the questionnaire inquiring about use made of the earlier study document "Women in the Church," and about the same percent of those having actually examined it, one can generalize about the eagerness with which this subject is met!

I do not deny that the Mennonite Church has made some progress since Assembly '73 with this concern. My problem was, I went to Assembly '75 with personal expectations to discuss such aspects as: Have we examined the historical roots of "headship" based in biology (the menstrual cycle)? Is there a contradiction between "the priesthood of all believers" and "headship"? Is Herald Press a help or hindrance? Who are dependable, consistent advocates within education - Mennonite high schools and colleges? What do we teach our children by word and deed about singleness and marriage? Do we not each feel "called" - why ordain? Who are the role models for women in our church today? Do we care enough to act on denominational curriculum materials that "overlook" numerous good women models in bible and church his-

tory? How do we women get control of ourselves, not control over men? Why are women who study about women suspect; they are "credited" with mere bias, while gathering knowledge about and experience with other subjects qualifies one to be taken seriously. How can we creatively speak to the use made of scripture, the inadequate expectations for marriage in such popular books as The Total Woman?

At one Kingdom Interest Group meeting considerable time was given to where women are leading in different congregations. The important issues, I think, go beyond the mere frequency of positions held. When will we discuss: What changes in attitudes result from genuine cooperation? Can interdependence be realized if women are still seen as dependent on men but not vice versa? Are we ready to admit incompleteness if either men or women are excluded?

Another KIG that might have probed why many men are threatened by competence in women (demanding a reorientation of the ego), or why many women want to be "protected" by men (so self-confidence and personal responsibility won't be expected), spent time instead illustrating points of view that are all too familiar, hardly valid options. The inability to grasp what authentic interdependence is reminded me of my friend in India who came to clean. He had never known "cleanness" by my standards so didn't perceive what I thought was dirt. When we fail to comprehend the dynamics of true mutuality, we allow the youth to conclude "that women should be allowed leadership roles provided the men approve!"

Enuf said, eh? Have you any suggestions for discovering other women and men who want to grapple with and pray over the types of concerns I wanted but didn't find discussed at Eureka? My hope is that our MCC Task Force will make such interchange and changes for the good of all possible. I really look forward to our November meeting in Ottawa.

Sincerely.

Dorothy Yoder Nyce

II. Task Force business: Lively and well

COLLEGE CONTACTS SOUGHT

Katie Funk Wiebe, Task Force member from Hillsboro, Kansas, is currently working at contacting Mennonite schools and colleges across North America to discover what they are doing to help students achieve a better understanding of the Christian approach to the role of men and women in church and society.

She hopes to share her findings with these schools to help them gather ideas, information and resources for further exploration of this issue in their settings.

At present Katie is requesting the following items from Mennonite colleges, Bible schools and seminaries:

- 1) Lists of courses dealing with the role of women in church and society - human sexuality, family, law, etc.
 - 2) Copies of research papers in this area,
 - 3) A list of library holdings on this topic including audiovisual materials,
 - 4) A list of effective lecturers with expertise in this subject.
- She hopes to make this material available to all the schools as she receives it.

Teachers have been making use of the task force packet "Persons Becoming" which is still available from MCC headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania and various bookstores for \$1.50. Another item which Katie is willing to share with interested people is a lengthy bibliography prepared by Anna Juhnke for her project on Women and Social Justice at Bethel College. Included is a good list of audiovisual materials.

As a starting point for her Task Force project, Katie is asking each school to appoint a contact person who will work with her in trying to find ways of achieving a better understanding of the Christian approach to the roles of men and women.

Those with information or requests can write to Katie at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas 67063.

THE NEW CURRICULUM: WE MUST WORK TOGETHER by Helen Kruger

The writers for the new Sunday school curriculum, the Foundation Series, met for a writers' conference June 9-13 at Laurelville Church Center, Pa. Of the 39 writers, 35 were women, women with various occupational skills, the majority being homemakers as well. This places a great responsibility on the women of the three participating conferences: the General Conference, the Mennonite Church and the Brethren in Christ (the Church of the Brethren and Mennonite Brethren were represented by several writers as well). I couldn't help wondering if writers had been chosen only on the basis of their qualifications, or whether it was a matter of convenience for women who are in the home to fit writing into their schedules and earn some extra money.

The main thrust of the new material is to be a Biblical-centered content which begins and emerges from the Biblical material. This is our way of writing an Anabaptist curriculum which allows individuals to respond to the Holy Spirit in interpreting scripture.

Along with the unique emphasis on the aspects of our faith like discipleship and brotherhood, it is also the task of the writers to strive for methods and activities which grow out of the material itself (as opposed to any kind of busy work or crafts) as an integral part of the learner's response and application. At this point the writers must also keep in mind the average teacher for whom she is writing: female, middle-aged, married, with a high school education. It will be the teacher's assignment to carry out the activities and relate them to individual students. In the chain of writing, editing, publishing, and teaching, it is the teacher link which would seem to be of the greatest importance. It is quite possible that, lacking a great deal of input from male perspective, this material will lean heavily in the direction of female-mother-teacher role method.

The writers' conference featured resource people in the areas of music, art, and drama as well as story-telling and theology. In connection with avoiding sexist language, and stereotyping males and females, a film was shown one afternoon which illustrated the current stereotype of women found in many school textbooks. Women were shown as creatures of the indoors, as highly emotional humans, crying or laughing, with only certain occupations featured such as housekeeping, child care, nursing and teaching. The film pointed out very aptly what opportunities girls were missing by accepting this kind of role - not for them the healthy outdoor life of horseback riding, sports, highly trained professions like medicine or law.

After watching the film, a young writer-mother turned to me and said, "Oh, I feel so depressed. If only I had known of some of those possibilities, but now it's too late." She was not speaking of being dissatisfied with being a mother and wife, just voicing frustration at being limited and relegated to a certain status without a choice.

The writers of the Sunday school materials have a tremendous challenge before them. And I think they will meet that challenge to the best of their ability. But I wonder if we have really taken seriously the matter of equality and qualifications; Sunday school children need women and men as teachers, writers, and examples. Conversely, women are also capable of administering the setting up of curriculum, of editing and publishing as well. Is Sunday school teaching and the writing of curriculum important enough for men? The training and nurture of children is probably the most important task of the church; it demands the most qualified persons in the church, male and female, to be writers, and especially teachers for our children. We need to work together for the building of the kingdom.

STORIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN WHICH AVOID STEREOTYPES by Sue Clemmer Steiner

A lot of non-sexist book lists for children are currently being compiled by librarians and by women's resource centres. The titles included generally fall into three categories: 1) stories with an inventive girl as the main character, 2) stories which indicate the range of activities and responses open to boys, and 3) stories dealing with adult careers. It is important to me that these books succeed first of all as well-written and well-illustrated stories. "Propaganda" dare not overwhelm literary merit.

In this Report I'm concentrating on secular books for pre-schoolers and beginning readers. Books for more advanced readers will follow in the next issue. Prices quoted are American; add approximately 15% in Canada.

Madeline by Ludwig Bemelmans. Viking, \$4.95 cloth, \$1.25 paper.

The story of a stalwart heroine in a French boarding school who is undaunted by an appendectomy and hospital stay. Part of a series of five titles.

Play with Me by Marie Hall Ets. Viking, \$3.50 cloth, \$.95 paper.

A very little girl goes into the meadow to play, and the small animals run away from her one by one. Her method of getting them all back makes a delightful story.

Katy and the Big Snow by Virginia L. Burton. Houghton Mifflin, \$3.75 cloth, \$.95 paper.

The story of a very competent snow-plow named Katy, who clears the road to the hospital, the burning house, and the airport when the whole city of Geopolis is snowed in.

William's Doll by Charlotte Zolotow. Harper and Row, \$3.95 cloth.

William wants a doll, in addition to the basketball and electric train.

Of course he should have a doll,
Grandmother decides - how else can he
practice being a father?

Ira Sleeps Over by Bernard Waber.
Houghton Mifflin, \$4.95 cloth, \$1.50
paper.

Ira struggles to decide whether to
take his teddy bear "Tah, Tah" along
when sleeping over at Reggie's house.
What if Reggie laughs at him? Set in
a family where Father cooks and Mother
reads the paper.

The Sneaky Machine by Marguerite Rudolph.
McGraw, \$4.95 cloth.

The vacuum cleaner is Henry's favour-
ite machine, and he loves to use it
at his grandmother's house - until
his friends claim he's doing
"mommies' work".

Arthur's Christmas Cookies by Lillian
Hoban. Harper and Row, \$2.95 cloth.

A monkey finds that the cookies he's
baked as a present for his parents
are hard as rocks and entirely inedi-
ble so he turns them into excellent
tree ornaments. An I CAN READ book.

My Doctor by Harlow Rockwell. Macmillan
\$4.35 cloth.

Shows a young child the things to be
found in a doctor's office. The pa-
tient is a little boy; the doctor is
a woman.

Busy People by Joe Kaufman. Golden
Press, \$3.95.

Among the eight occupations profiled
for pre-schoolers are Doris Doctor
and Irma Installer.

Girls Can Be Anything by Norma Klein.
Dutton, \$4.50 cloth, \$2.35 paper.

A girl decides she wants to be the
doctor, not the nurse, and the pilot,
not the stewardess, to the distress of
the little boy she's playing with.

Eleanor Roosevelt by Jane Goodsell.
Crowell, \$1.10 paper. A Crowell Bio-
graphy.

Written at grade 3 level, this account
includes Eleanor's struggles to over-
come her shyness and to assert herself
in forging her own style as First Lady.

IWY TRIBUNE HIGHLIGHTS THIRD WORLD CONFLICT by Luann Habegger Martin

With nearly 6,000 women and men
from 81 countries attending the Inter-
national Women's Year Tribune held in
Mexico City this June, one would expect
to find differences. However, many of
those attending the United Nations'
sponsored event for nongovernmental
organizations were unprepared for the
conflicts these differences created.

There were disputes between the rich
and the poor nations. Third World women
talked about redistributing resources
between rich and poor while women from
the industrially developed countries
spoke in terms of redistributing power
between men and women. To those North
American feminists who said, "We under-
stand your situation," Third World women
retorted, "But you're only part of the
repressive structure which is interfer-
ing with our national affairs."

Americans were accused of being
imperialists, oppressors, and greedy
consumers of the world's wealth. While
some of the U.S. women at the Tribune
agreed with that analysis, they were
frustrated that discussions frequently
centered on what they saw as the agenda
of the male power structures. Why, they
asked, must the Middle East conflict and
apartheid engage the time of those who
travelled to Mexico City to discuss the
inequalities that exist between men and
women in status, employment, and oppor-
tunity? Couldn't political differences
be overlooked so that women from all over
the world might unite and set forth com-
mon goals for the advancement of women?

Yet, women are political beings,
actively involved (though often only to
the degree men will allow) in the strug-
gle for their countries' independence
and development. This struggle, they
maintain, cannot be temporarily set aside
for it is seen as the means to their lib-
eration, a liberation to be achieved with
the men at their side. The Latin women
particularly emphasized that they were
not like the press image of the North
American feminist: anti-male and anti-
family. They regard the family as the
core of the nation.

Another area of difference became

apparent when the word "choice" was used. Gloria Steinem once remarked, "What women want is autonomy; what we want is control over our own lives - not to exert power over others' lives. The essence of feminism is choice - for women and men." To Third World women, their sisters in the technologically developed countries are privileged beings who can make choices not open to them because they lack education and marketable skills. For example, the female adult illiteracy in North America is 1.9%; the rate in Africa is 83.7%. The contrast in lifestyle between a peasant woman in Ethiopia with that of a New Yorker is overwhelming.

Amidst the differences, there were of course many similarities. All over the world societal discrimination starts at the cradle. The gap between the economic and social status of women and that of men continues throughout life. One common denominator shared by the women here was a desire to alter the status quo. For some, change meant a radical restructuring of the existing order. For others, change basically involved a greater participation by women within the present systems.

If asked what I personally gained by attending the Tribune, I would list the following points: 1) If we, as North American Christian feminists are to dialogue with our Third World sis-

ters, we will need to be politically literate. 2) We must honestly assess whether we are, in fact, oppressors and greedy consumers. 3) If our attitude toward theology is not one of mutual sharing and discovery, our Third World sisters will view us as dogmatic and in some ways imperialistic. 4) A recognition of historical, material, and cultural differences will help us appreciate and support women's movements in other countries at whatever stage they may be. 5) On the whole the impact of religion in the development of women was a topic overlooked by the Tribune planners. Either they believed that the topic was too sensitive or they grossly underplayed the effect of religion on the status of women.

My overall impression of the Tribune is that it was an eloquent and forceful statement of the renewed commitment by thousands to strive for equality, development, and peace. No one could leave the Tribune without recognizing that the cause of the women's movement is just and that the strength of the movement is growing. As Jennifer Seymour Whitaker notes in her excellent article in a recent issue of Foreign Affairs, the conference at Mexico City "... undoubtedly has made a difference. It has raised to the level of official respectability social issues which have always and in every society been minimized."

III. Task Force Mini-reports: Seminars across the Sisterhood

B.C. GATHERING DISCUSSES IMAGES OF SINGLENESS by Herta Funk

If no one ever marries me -
And I don't see why they should,
For nurse says I'm not pretty
And I'm seldom very good -

This whimsical little ditty raises a basic question of image for a small minority of people, mostly women. If no one ever marries them, what does that mean? Is not being married always the result of a personal defect?

How do single people look at themselves, and what image do others have of them? These were some of the questions raised at the conference on "The church and single adults" at Columbia Bible Institute, Clearbrook, B.C. on August 13-17.

A number of stereotypes of single adults underwent close scrutiny: the unhappy single, half a human being, an object of marriage, a perpetual minor, a problem for the church. At this conference, however, there was little bemoaning of the single state by the 70 participants. One person wrote in her

evaluation on the almost too happy atmosphere of the conference: "The tone of the whole workshop was positive (i.e., we are happy as we are and we want others to see that), but could we also give help to such singles who are still struggling with rejection (a romance that didn't work out, or broken marriage, the death of a spouse)?"

Two attitudes became clear: single people - widowed, separated, divorced, never-married - want to be accepted as whole people like everyone else. Some, for that reason, even questioned the advisability of a conference like this because it might only deepen the rift between single and married people. On the other hand they wanted people in the church to know that their single status naturally meant they had some different needs than married people.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT MALE AND FEMALE? by Margaret Loewen Reimer

"The roles of men and women in theological perspective". That was the theme of an October weekend at Camp Assiniboia near Winnipeg, Manitoba. Attending were pastors, church workers, students and a variety of interested individuals. Five papers were read on biblical and historical materials - Genesis 1-3, Old Testament, the gospels, Paul's letters and post-biblical history - as it relates to men and women.

A few excerpts from the weekend:

"Through the coming of the new Adam, Jesus Christ, men and women can again claim the original purpose of creation and strive to attain it in a fallen world."

"The 'great heroes of faith' which we hold up as examples in Sunday school are also portrayed in the Old Testament as sinful men involved in shameful acts against women."

"Our approach to biblical 'law' has kept us in our place. But the purpose of the law is to move society toward an ideal, not to become normative for all time."

"We do Paul a disservice if we seek to free him from his time and thus re-

solve the tension he experienced between the age that was and the age that was to come."

"History would suggest that abolishing or de-emphasizing the significance of ordination (the current General Conference stage) presents the greatest possibilities for an increased role for women and other lay persons."

"Non-Roman-Catholic Christianity, having rejected celibacy as a vocation, has not yet come to terms with the role of the single person; this poses a much greater problem for the single woman than it does for the single man, because most roles of the married man are open to the latter."

'FIRST TIME' FOR ONTARIO WOMEN

Ontario Mennonites recently celebrated their 450-year history as Anabaptist Mennonites with a Festival of Joy over the October Thanksgiving weekend. One of the events was a workshop on women led by Anna Mary Brubacher of St. Jacobs, Ontario.

She presented a brief history of Anabaptist women but the discussion shifted quickly to the immediate concerns of the women who attended. The women who attended were eager to participate. Two older women remarked on how their perspectives had shifted the past few years. Some mentioned that this was the first time they had been free to relate their personal experiences and problems.

One young man from another denomination was quick to point out that women in other traditions were struggling with many of the same issues.

One project for IWY is a packet on sexism in church literature compiled by a group of Saskatchewan women (non-Mennonite). Included in the packet is a brown envelope on which is written: "Church literature perpetuates sexism." Inside the envelope is a stack of pamphlets from Heart to Heart radio broadcast, Harrisonburg, Va. What is our message as Mennonites for our time?